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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REPORT: INTERNATIONAL MEDIA  
COVERAGE OF MAOIST-IMPOSED BLOCKADE AND NATIONAL MEDIA'S  
REACTION

[1](#)1. "'Kathmandu under siege.' Really?"

SUMMARY. One of the title-page stories in the centrist daily "The Kathmandu Post" (E/D) lambasted the exaggerations by the foreign (particularly Indian) media quoting particularly alarmist excerpts from The Times of India, The Hindustan Times, Star News, India, CNN, NDTV, and Indian Express above a cartoon showing a man sitting on a toilet (pants down) in flak jacket and helmet bearing the inscription "Foreign Media." He is sitting in what's obviously a hotel bathroom speaking into microphones labeled "CNN, BBC, NDTV, Star, HT, TOI, Zee" etc. connected to a TV camera. A darkish cloud above the toilet is illuminated by the TV lights. Caption: "It's becoming very difficult to breathe due to the thick smoke of bomb blasts... Reporting live from Kathmandu!" In a press meeting on Monday, Deputy Prime Minister Adhikari criticized the handling of information about the blockade by some foreign media. END SUMMARY

The following excerpts appeared above the cartoon in the Kathmandu Post:

BEGIN QUOTE

Rare media spotlight fell on Nepal once again this week. Often hyped and sensationalized, the world media, specifically Indian media, were nowhere near ground reality when they splashed or broadcast reports on the Maoist 'blockade.' Here are some samples.

Maoist rebels cut off routes to Kathmandu  
(The Times of India, August 19)  
Maoist rebels in Nepal blocked routes to capital Kathmandu on Wednesday, bringing hardship and shortages to the city of 1.5 million people as transporters stayed off the highways. All roads leading to Kathmandu were nearly empty as buses, trucks and cars stopped plying on Tuesday midnight as the blockade began.

Rebels scare away road traffic to Kathmandu  
(The Hindustan Times, August 19)  
The roads to Kathmandu fell silent on Wednesday. Maoist rebels successfully began an indefinite blockade of the Nepalese capital despite a strong army presence. There was almost no vehicular traffic on the main arterial roads to the city. It was a sign of their confidence that they targeted Kathmandu and demanded, among other things, the release of some of their leaders held in Nepalese and Indian prisons.

Maoists capture two highways leading to Kathmandu  
(Star News, India, August 20)  
The Maoists have captured the two highways connecting Kathmandu with the rest of the country. The situation in Kathmandu is very serious. People are afraid to go outside the capital. Even within the city, the people are afraid to come out of their homes. The food supply is scarce, with the prices of essential goods skyrocketing.

On Kathmandu's food stocks  
(CNN, August 20)  
Nepal's capital Kathmandu has only a few days worth of fresh produce and cooking fuel, officials say, as a rebel blockade enters its third day.

Indian food support to Nepal  
(NDTV With PTI inputs Monday, August 23)  
India has reportedly sent 70 trucks of essential commodities to help break the Maoist blockade of Kathmandu. The Prime Minister of Nepal, Sher Bahadur Deuba, has rejected the UN offer of mediating in talks with the rebels. However, Deuba has not ruled out an expanded role for India in resolving the conflict in the Himalayan kingdom. When asked, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat denied that Nepal has made any such request. "I am not aware of any such request," Mahat told the Post. "I should be knowing but there is no such move."

Supplies roll into Kathmandu after Delhi-backed plan

hits ground

(Indian Express, August 23)

'The Siege Next Door', said the catchy sub-head. On Saturday night, under a tight security cover thrown by the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), 10 trucks loaded with vegetables and essential commodities quietly slipped into the Capital Valley. Believed to be driven by Indian drivers all the way from Raxaul.

(To this, RNA spokesperson Rajendra Kumar Thapa said, "This is ridiculous, we do have close cooperation between the two security forces, but there's no such thing as a New Delhi-backed plan.")

END QUOTE

## 12. "The capital under siege"

Opinion by regular columnist Ameet Dhakal in the "Kathmandu Post" (8/24): "Last one week has been both bizarre and surreal. We, about two million Kathmanduites, have been living under Maoist blockade. Bizarre because, blockade of a city, that too, for an indefinite period, is in itself an archaic thing. Completely anachronous!" "And surreal because, 'the capital under siege' is living a normal life. Yes, the price of green vegetables and our all time favorite aaloo has shot up. But everything else is following a mundane routine of a city life. Crowded traffic, people rushing to office, cabs packed for afternoon snacks and restaurants for evening booze. And constant inquiries at DVD parlors about Fida's arrival. Nothing has changed. There are no long queues for essential goods, no much hoarding, no panicky at all."

"There are no signs of 'city under siege' except in the idiot box of the foreign TV channels and in the pages of the foreign newspapers. All the parachute journalists, who landed in Kathmandu with a foregone conclusion of 'city under siege' while they were in London, Bangkok or in New Delhi saw nothing but the 'siege.' One Indian TV channel reported, 'People are scared to come out of their home and Maoists have taken control of the highways leading to Kathmandu.' Yes, I was 'scared' after I watched that report in the idiot box, not before. The old adage, 'when hammer is the only tool in your hand, all you'll see is nails' proved so true once again."

"Gaurav C Sawant, special correspondent of the STAR News, came to my office and talked to me on Friday. He had landed the same day to cover the 'siege.' After I explained how normal Kathmandu was, he, at one point, told me that the minister, who he was going to talk to later on, would defend the normalcy. So, he wanted me to talk the 'abnormal' while there wasn't one. It is not that he didn't know how normal life was in Kathmandu. Actually, Gaurav booked a plane ticket for his wife, Aditee, to come to Kathmandu so that they could enjoy the evening life in Thamel. I jokingly told him not to forget to mention in his STAR News report that his wife was coming to Kathmandu so that people will understand the essence of the 'city under siege.' Of course, the number of vehicles coming to and going out from Kathmandu has gone down. So what, when life hasn't changed much in Kathmandu?"

"I earnestly hope that the foreign media would reflect on how they covered Maoist blockade in Kathmandu and the Maoists on how Kathmandu has reacted to the blockade."

"It should ring an alarm bell to the Maoists. They imposed a blockade on this capital city out of deep resentment. They must have been wondering how Kathmandu could live a normal life, and with much apathy to their 'People's War' when much of the kingdom is reeling under their terror. They also have other reasons to resent: Their over 150 Special Task Force (STF) militias under special assignment in the valley have been killed. So flop was their STF operation that, insiders say, it was finally pulled off. Moreover, many of their senior leaders assigned in the valley have been either captured or killed. Some of them have even 'defected' to the security forces and leaked crucial information."

"Thus, the valley blockade had two objectives. First, to display Maoists rancor, and, second, to force people to revolt against the state out of ensuing crises due to the blockade. However, if the Maoists acted out of deep resentment against the people of Kathmandu, the latter, too, has responded with defiance. Even with vengeance."

"The blockade has not only reinforced Kathmandu's apathy towards Maoists, but it has also added to people's suspicion of them. Many people are already talking

about the possibility of Year Zero in Nepal, as it happened in Cambodia, should the Maoist capture Kathmandu. The shut down of the ten big industries in Kathmandu due to Maoist threat, killing of journalist Dekendra Raj Thapa and death threat to other ten journalists has made the possibility of the Year Zero in Nepal all the more real."

"If this blockade was intended to scare people of Kathmandu and to provoke them for a popular revolt against the state, it has exactly done the opposite. Industrialists, media and common people seem eager than ever to express solidarity with the government. Now, the Maoists should do a soul searching: what's the point of the blockade that only punishes the common men (and women) of Kathmandu? After all, the price rise in Kathmandu is going to hit the poor, not the elite. A revolution or a movement aimed at a meaningful social change cannot be based on resentment, a divisive force. It has to be based on hope and optimism that unifies masses and galvanizes them for a positive social change. Unfortunately, the whole Maoist philosophy and movement sources so much from the hatred and resentment pool. Using divisive language for political benefit is, however, not only a Maoist thing. Even in the United States, 'people' vs 'powerful' has remained an all-time rhetoric of the democrats except in the present presidential campaign. John Kerry, the Democratic presidential candidate, has deliberately avoided using this 'two America' slogan. 'I want to unify the nation, not divide,' Kerry has been quoted as saying."

"But Maoist tactics has been to polarize and divide the nation along the fault lines of class, ethnicity and geography. The last one week has only exposed its risk: If we continue to remain divided and muddled, foreigners will meddle. Therefore, let's unite and jointly explore our common destiny."

### 13. "Valley sees rise in to-and-fro vehicle flow"

Report in the pro-India "Himalayan Times" (E/D, 8/24): "There is steady increase in the number of vehicles plying in and out of the Valley after the security forces' claim that the security has been tightened at the highways linking Valley from outside. Despite the fear among the Kathmanduites that the essential commodities would fall short, the security have been claiming there is no need to fear and people should defy Maoists blockade. According to the Royal Nepa-lese Army, 399 vehicles passed Nagdhunga checkpoint, 1,593 Sanga and 169 Mudkhu checkpoint before entering the Valley, while 506 vehicles left the Valley from Nagdhunga, 1,424 from Sanga and 161 vehicles valley from Mudkhu check point. "It's certain that people cannot tolerate such blockades for long and their defiance would rise gradually," said Bishnu Rimal, general secretary of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade

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Unions (GEFONT). A protest programme would be organised by GEFONT and Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC) tomorrow seeking removal of the indefinite blo-ckade and the opening of 12 companies been shut by the Maoists."

### 14. "World media `over blowing' situation here"

Report in "The Himalayan Times" (8/24): "Minister for Information and Communication Dr Mohammad Mohsin today said that international media overblew Nepal's present situation as multinational companies shut down their industries reacting to the Maoist threats. Some of the major multinational companies and a leading hotel stopped operating their businesses since last Wednesday, citing threats from the Maoists. 'These companies closed their businesses despite the government's assurances of providing full security,' Mohsin, who is also the government spokesperson, told this daily. He said that the international media "exaggerated the present situation". Today's regular cabinet meeting also expressed its concern over the media reports that the rebels had encircled the Kathmandu Valley from all sides to create havoc to its residents. Minister Raghuji Pant said the government is determined to foil the Maoist-called blockade. Meanwhile, a seven-member taskforce constituted to draft a terms of reference for the High-Level Peace Committee Nepal submitted its report to the Prime Minister yesterday."

### 15. "Blockade fizzles out due to security: DPM"

Report in the government-owned "Rising Nepal" (E/D, 8/24): "Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari said Monday that the Maoist sponsored so-called blockade of the Kathmandu valley had gradually been weakened with the government's move to step up security to foil it altogether."

'The valley life is normal. The valley dwellers are not panicking over the so-called blockade, as the government has been able to keep the price of food items and petroleum products under control. With the passage of time, the effect of the so-called blockade has waned gradually ever since it was said to have been called five days back,' Adhikari told a face-to-face program organized by the Reporters' Club. A large number of journalists from the national and international media had attended the program. Adhikari also called on the owners of the closed industries and hotels to resume business, reaffirming the government's commitment to provide security to them."

"The industrialists overreacted to the Maoist threats and blasts by closing down their industries, he said. Adhikari said it was high time that business entrepreneurs cooperated with the government in this difficult hour."

"He also expressed regret over the handling of information about the blockade by a section of the Indian media. 'I urge the foreign media people to visit hotels, restaurants and night clubs and find the truth.' On the talks with the rebels, Adhikari said that the government was for result-oriented and meaningful talks."

"He claimed that the environment was becoming favourable to hold talks with the Maoists, but he said the government had not yet contacted them. Asked whether the government is planning to remove the terrorist tag on the rebels as a prerequisite for the negotiation, Adhikari said until they show good faith, it is unlikely that the government would remove the terrorist tag and red corner notice issued against them."

"But we are ready to sit for peace talks without any conditions. 'We will present ourselves with maximum flexibility in the talks if it will take place.' Also speaking at the function, human rights activist and ex-facilitator of the earlier government-Maoist peace talks Padam Ratna Tuladhar stood to disagree with Adhikari and said the government had not taken any serious initiative to hold talks."

"'I agree that the forthcoming peace talks should be held confidentially but to my knowledge the government has not yet shown seriousness to the talks,' he claimed. Ex-Chief of the Army Staff Satchit Shumsher JBR said that the Royal Nepalese Army had destroyed the strength of the Maoists and they were not in the position to launch offensive against the troops."

'The Maoists have now resorted to terror tactics. And the blockade is one other way of the Maoists to terrorise the people,' Rana said. Rana said that the Maoist insurgency had flared up largely due to the poor security situation in the past. Conflict experts Dr. Bishnu Raj Upreti and Dr. Indrajeet Rai claimed that the Maoists had strategically succeeded to draw the attention at national and international levels by imposing the blockades in the Kathmandu Valley."

"Both of them said that the government should first remove the terrorist tag and red corner notice issued against the rebels as part of the confidence building measure before starting the negotiation."

#### **16. "India preparing to air-drop food from air"**

Commentary in leftist "Nispakshya" (V/W, 8/24):

"The nation's capital is under siege after some low-level Maoist leader issued a statement. The party leadership has not reacted to this blockade called by some district leaders. The blockade has not affected the rich but the poor people only. If the Maoists' movement runs under the orders of some district level leaders, then it sure has moved out of hand from the central leaders. The government seems unaffected by the blockade. It's unfortunate that the foreign media persons who came to cover the 'blockade' have not tried to give the real picture and are instead indulging in showing the sad situation of Nepalis. It is according to the grand design that the Indian government is planning to hurl food from air and mobilize the Indian army, citing worsening situation."

#### **17. "Why international outcry saying security situation is not right?"**

Commentary in pro-palace "Gorkha Express" (V/W, 8/24):

"A statement by the Maoists asking some multinationals to shut down sent tremors around the world. The international media went wild with reports stating that situation in Nepal has worsened. Their energy went into giving an impression of anarchy. Is it not an attempt

to march in Indian army on the reference of security situation? Nepalese should be careful of the potential dangers."

MORIARTY